



News Release

For immediate release: August 2, 2011

(11-114)

Contacts: [Gordon MacCracken](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

Protect yourself against the bites, stings, and disease risk of summer's pests

OLYMPIA — Summer has arrived – a little later than usual – and with a relatively long stretch of warmer weather in the forecast for Washington comes a variety of bugs that sting and bite. Knowing how bugs behave can help avoid bug bites and stinging.

Deer flies and horse flies can deliver painful, itchy bites as well as transmit tularemia, a bacterial disease. Horse and deer flies are active during the day. They're common around ponds, streams and marshes, so cover exposed skin and use a repellent.

Honey bees and bumble bees will sting to protect a hive or nest, but they're important pollinators of flowering plants. Bees looking for nectar or pollen away from the hive or nest will rarely sting, except when stepped on or deliberately provoked.

If a bee stings you, remove the stinger by scraping the back of a straight-edged object like a credit card across the stinger. Don't use tweezers to remove stingers — these may squeeze the venom sac and increase the amount of venom released. If you're bitten or stung, immediately remove nearby rings and constricting items because the affected area may swell.

Wasps, hornets, and yellow jackets can be easily provoked. Most stings cause only mild discomfort, but some may result in severe allergic reactions that require immediate medical care and may cause death, so take precautions to avoid being stung.

If you're allergic to wasp and bee stings, carry identification that details your allergy and any medication you're taking. Severe reactions can affect the whole body and may occur quickly, often within minutes. They may be fatal if untreated. Call 9-1-1 if someone who is stung has chest pain, face or mouth swelling, trouble swallowing, trouble breathing, or goes into shock.

Summer also brings out ticks. Washington is home to two types of ticks, hard and soft. Hard ticks are most often encountered when hiking on trails. They attach to their victim's body for two to six days to get their blood meal. Although the risk is low, hard ticks can transmit Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and tularemia, as well as cause tick paralysis. Dogs are favorite tick victims, so be sure to check your dog carefully for ticks. Check yourself, children, and outdoors partners, too.

Soft ticks are in mountainous areas where they will feed only at night. Soft ticks can transmit relapsing fever, Washington's most prevalent tick-borne disease. If you have fevers with chills, aches, or sweats within a few weeks after a stay at a mountain cabin or home, see your health-care provider and say you may have been exposed to a relapsing fever tick.

To avoid insect bites and stings, use insect repellents, following the directions on the label. Cover up when outside and bugs are out. Wear long pants, socks, and long sleeves. Try to stay indoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Mosquitoes can transmit [West Nile virus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) (www.doh.wa.gov/wnv). Stagnant water is excellent mosquito habitat. Don't let it collect around your home, in ditches, gutters, containers, or pools. Use insect screens on doors and windows. Don't leave litter or food where it may attract yellow-jackets, hornets, or wasps. Get experts to deal with nests when you find them.

Rodents seldom bite and don't sting, but some of them do carry and transmit potentially deadly [hantavirus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/factsheet/hanta.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/factsheet/hanta.htm>). A recent case of [hantavirus in Yakima](http://yakimahealthdistrict.org/w/news/) was fatal (yakimahealthdistrict.org/w/news/). The virus is found in droppings, urine and saliva of deer mice. People can be exposed when they breathe in contaminated air. Keep rodents out of your home and take safety precautions when cleaning up after them. Wear gloves, avoid stirring up dust, and thoroughly disinfect contaminated areas.

More information on summer pests is on the Department of Health [zoonotic disease website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/zoo.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/zoo.htm).

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).